

Message Text

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14
ACTION EA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 8069

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: PBOR, MARR, KS, KN
SUBJ: NORTH KOREAN ACTIVITIES IN YELLOW SEA: ROK REQUEST
TO CONVEY FIRM MESSAGE TO DPRK

1. BEGIN SUNNARY: VICE FOREIGN MINISTER YUN SUK HUEN TOLD CHARGE ROKG REGARDED NORTH KOREAN CLAIM IN MILITARY ARMISTICE COMMISSION MEETING YESTERDAY (DEC 1) AS UNILATERAL EFFORT TO MODIFY THE TERMS OF ARMISTICE. ROK WOULD AVOID PROVOCATIVE ACTION, BUT INTENDED TO DEFEND FIRMLY ITS RIGHT OF ACCESS AND REQUESTED THAT USG MAKE THIS POSITION CLEAR TO THE NK AUTHORITIES. HE SAID ROK DID NOT INTEND TO USE HOTLINE OR OTHER NORTH/SOUTH DIALOGUE MECHANISMS TO COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY WITH NORTH ON THIS PROBLEM ASSERTING THAT WAS PURELY A MAC MATTER AND SHOULD BE HANDLED IN MILITARY CHANNELS. CHARGE SAID WE WOULD EXPECT ROK POLITICAL ACTIONS BEYOND FIRM MILITARY POSTURE TO DEAL WITH SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

2. VICE FOREIGN MINISTER CALLED ME IN TODAY (DEC 2) TO GIVE ME HIS GOVERNMENT'S VIEWS ON THE RECENT NK NAVAL ACTIONS IN CONFIDENTIAL

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THE YELLOW SEA AND THEIR DEMAND AT YESTERDAY'S MAC MEETING THAT PERMISSION BE SOUGHT BEFORE VESSELS OF OUR SIDE COULD HAVE ACCESS TO FIVE UNC-CONTROLLED ISLANDS.

3. YUN SAID HIS GOVERNMENT VIEWED THIS ACTION OF NORTH KOREANS AS A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO THE ARMISTICE AGREEMENT, AND WE MUST RESPOND FIRMLY TO THIS UNILATERAL EFFORT TO CHANGE THE ARMISTICE TERMS. IF WE RESPOND TIMIDLY THE NORTH MAY ATTEMPT TO PROFIT BY OUR WEAKNESS BY A BOLD ACTION TO GRAB THE ISLANDS. THEIR PRINCIPLE OBJECTIVE, HE CONTINUED IS TO PROVOKE US INTO SOME SMALL SCALE RESPONSE TO JUSTIFY A MAJOR ATTEMPT TO SEIZE ALL OF THE FIVE ISLANDS. WE FEEL THE IMPLICATIONS ARE GRAVE AND THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO WARN THEM WITH FIRMNESS SO THAT THEY WILL KNOW IN ADVANCE THE GRAVE CONSEQUENCES OF ANY ACTION TO PREVENT US FROM EXERCISING OUR RIGHT OF ACCESS TO THE ISLANDS. YUN SAID THEY MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THEY WOULD BEAR COMPLETE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANYTHING WHICH MIGHT OCCUR. WE HOPE, CONTINUED THE VICE MINISTER, THAT THE USG WILL USE ALL POSSIBLE AVENUES TO LET NK KNOW THAT WE WILL RESPOND FIRMLY TO ANY HOSTILE ACTION.

3. I SAID THAT THIS POSITION HAD BEEN STATED PUBLICLY BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE YESTERDAY AND ASKED IF THE ROK PLANNED ANY FURTHER ACTIONS. HE REPLIED THAT ROKG MILITARY WAS CONSULTING WITH UNC AND THAT ROKG WISHED TO REJECT TOTALLY THE NK DEMAND. ROKG WOULD NOT TAKE PROVOCATIVE ACTION BUT WE MUST MAKE IT CRYSTAL CLEAR THAT WE WILL NOT YIELD UNDER PRESSURE.

4. I SAID THAT I THOUGHT WASHINGTON WOULD WISH TO MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE COMPLEX LEGAL ASPECTS OF CLAIMS TO TERRITORIAL SEAS AND THE ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEMS SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO THE ARMISTICE. WE DID NOT, FOR EXAMPLE, REGARD THE CROSSING OF THE NLL AS AN ARMISTICE VIOLATION. SECONDLY, I THOUGHT THAT OUR GOVERNMENT AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WOULD EXPECT SOMETHING IN ADDITION TO A FIRM NON-PROVOCATIVE MILITARY POSTURE IN RESPONSE TO THE NK CLAIM. IN THE JULY 4 COMMUNIQUE BOTH SIDES UNDERTOOK NOT TO MAKE ARMED PROVOCATION AND TO ATTEMPT TO AVOID ANY INADVERTENT MILITARY INCIDENTS. IT WOULD BE ASSUMED THAT THE HOTLINE AND OTHER MECHANISMS IN THE NORTH/SOUTH DIALOGUE WOULD BE USED TO REDUCE TENSION
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AND AVOID A MILITARY CLASH.

5. YUN SAID THAT THE ROKG SAW THIS PURELY IN ARMISTICE TERMS. THE NORTH WAS ATTEMPTING A UNILATERAL CHANGE IN THE ARMISTICE AGREEMENT. THE MATTER THEREFORE HAD TO BE HANDLED THRU THE MAC AND IN MILITARY CHANNELS. THE NORTH/SOUTH COMMUNIQUE, WHATEVER ITS WORKING, WAS INTENDED TO BE A VEHICLE FOR BROAD GENERAL EXCHANGES. IT WAS NOT THE PROPER MECHANISM FOR HANDLING PROBLEMS OF THIS SORT. BESIDES, HE CONTINUED CURRENT NORTHERN ATTITUDES TOWARD RESUPTION OF BI-LATERAL TALKS GAVE NO PROMISE THAT APPROACH THROUGH THESE CHANNELS WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL. PERHAPS AFTER THE NORTH KOREANS HAD ABANDONED THEIR PROVOCATIVE ACTION AND THE ATMOSPHERE AT THE NORTH/SOUTH

DIALOGUE HAD IMPROVED, THE SOUTH MIGHT AGREE TO DISCUSS THE TERRITORIAL SEA QUESTION IF THE NORTH BROUGHT IT UP. TO RAISE IT IN THIS CHANNEL NOW, HOWEVER, WOULD BE CONSIDERED A SIGN OF WEAKNESS.

6. I SAID THAT WHILE THESE CHANNELS MIGHT NOT BE PRODUCTIVE, IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT THE ROKG ATTEMPT TO USE THEM. A EFFORT TO GET A CLARIFICATION OF THE NK POSITION AND WORK OUT SOME INTERIM OPERATING ARRANGEMENTS TO TAKE CARE OF BOTH NORTH AND SOUTH MARITIME INTERESTS IN THE AREA WOULD GREATLY STRENGTHEN THE ROK PUBLIC POSITION.

7. THE MINISTER SAID THAT IF IT WERE MERELY A MATTER OF TERRITORIAL SEAS THIS WOULD CAUSE HIS GOVERNMENT NO CONCERN. IT COULD FOR EXAMPLE DECLARE A 12-MILE TERRITORIAL SEA OF ITS OWN AND DEFER ANY SETTLEMENT UNTIL AFTER THE LAW OF THE SEA CONFERENCE NEXT YEAR. HIS GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, SAW THE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE LAST MONTH AS A CALCULATED EFFORT TO CREATE AN INCIDENT THAT WOULD JUSTIFY THE NORTH SEIZING THE ISLANDS. HE ASKED THAT THE USG CONVEY TO THE PRC AND THE USSR, THE FIRMNESS OF THE ROK POSITION WITH THE HOPE THAT THESE FRIENDS OF NK COULD USE THEIR INFLUENCE TO AVOID AN EXTREMELY SERIOUS SITUATION. I SAID WHATEVER THE NORTH KOREANS' INTENTION, THE ROK POSITION WOULD BE STRONGER IF IT HAD MADE AN EFFORT TO TRY TO ESTABLISH WHETHER SOME LESS PROVOCATIVE GOAL WAS ALL THAT THE NORTH KOREANS HAD IN MIND.

8. COMMENT: AS WE ANTICIPATED THE ROKG WANTS TO DEFINE THE
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PROBLEM AS AN ARMISTICE MATTER AND KEEP US IN THE CENTER OF THE PICTURE. THEIR UNWILLINGNESS TO USE THE DIRECT NORTH/SOUTH MECHANISM MAY IN PART BE TO GIVE US NO WAY TO SHIFT ANY OF THIS RESPONSIBILITY. (YUN CONFIRMED IN RESPONSE TO A DIRECT QUESTION THAT THE HOT LINE THUS FAR HAD NOT BEEN USED.) THERE SEEKS ALSO A STRONG FEELING THAT THE NORTH RESPONDS ONLY TO SUPERIOR FORCE AND THAT EVEN RAISING THE MATTER WITH PYONGYANG THROUGH THIS CHANNEL WOULD BE AN UNMANLY SIGN OF WEAKNESS THAT THE NORTH MIGHT MIS INTERPRET. THERE IS OBVIOUSLY A CHANCE FOR A SERIOUS INCIDENT IN THIS SITUATION. THE NORTH HAS MADE A CLEAR CHALLENGE, AND IF IT ATTEMPTS TO TO ENFORCE ITS DEMAND, A ROK GOVERNMENT ALSO FACING DOMESTIC CHALLENGES TO ITS AUTHORITY MAY BE DRAWN TO A INTRANSIGENT MILITARY POSITION AS A TACTIC TO ALSO SILENCE ITS DOMESTIC CRITICS.

9. MAC SENIOR MEMBER HAS ALREADY EXPLICITLY REJECTED NORHT KOREAN DEMAND AT THE DEC 1 MAC MEETING. PURPOSE OF MEETING TODAY WAS CLEARLY TO GET US TO ACKNOWLEDGE ROKG ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUSNESS OF SITUATION AND CONVEY THIS SERIOUSNESS TO NK MAJOR POWER ALLIES.
UNDERHILL

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<< END OF DOCUMENT >>

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